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NOTES ON EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FICTIONAL TRANSLATIONS

A conspicuous feature of the development of English fiction before the nineteenth century is the importance of foreign models in their influence on native fiction through translation and imitation. This influence of translated fiction was curiously strengthened and directed by the methods employed by translators of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.¹ A critic writing in 1790 laments that "amidst the numberless translations which every day appear, both of the works of the ancients and moderns, there should be so few that are possessed of real merit," and points out that the universal sense of the utility of translation has been but a means of throwing the practice of translation "into mean and mercenary hands."² Of obvious inferiority were the hack-writers and professional fictionists of the first half of the eighteenth century whose translated novels were garbled abridgments and revisions which often completely metamorphosed in English guise their Spanish and French originals. It was their habit to adapt to English taste alien products, to reflect British standards of manners and morals by means of interpolations and alterations, in some cases changing the scene from Paris to London, sometimes substituting for French names typically British cognomens, often in greater or less degree modifying speech and thought and even most critical and characteristic acts to suit the purposes of entertainment plus instruction to which British fiction was so generally dedicated.

¹ In regard to the generally free poetical translations of the classics made at this period, see *Camb. Hist. of Eng. Lit.*, Vol. IX, chap. x. The training in translation provided by the school curricula is displayed in Hoole's *A New Discovery of the Old Art of Teaching School* (1660).

² Tytler, *An Essay on the Principles of Translation* (Everyman's Lib. ed., London and New York, n.d.), pp. 4-5. In this essay, originally a paper read before the Royal Society of Edinburgh, Lord Woodhouselee sums up the conflicting theories of translation and their practice in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He refers to the two standards of translation current during this period: "According to the former idea of translation, it is allowable to improve and to embellish; according to the latter, it is necessary to preserve even blemishes and defects" (*ibid.*, p. 8). Chapter iii he entitles, "Whether it is allowable for a translator to add to or retrench the ideas of the original. Examples of the use and abuse of this liberty."

Striking evidence of the complicated interrelations between English and French fiction in the eighteenth century, and perhaps an extreme example of the liberties allowed themselves by translators, both English and French, of the period, appears in an unnoted bibliographical tangle, centering around Mrs. Eliza Haywood's *The Fortunate Foundlings*, published in 1744.¹

The initial incident of the plot of this novel involves the finding of twin babes (named in an accompanying letter Horatio and Louisa) by an English gentleman, Dorilaus, who adopts them, educates them, secures a commission for Horatio, then inadvertently falls in love with Louisa. She flees from his passion, works as a milliner's apprentice, then becomes the companion of a lady of quality, Melanthe. The rest of Mrs. Haywood's novel recounts Melanthe's story of her life, the later amorous experiences of Melanthe and Louisa while traveling on the continent, and the military adventures of Horatio; and ends by explaining the mystery of the foundlings, who prove to be the offspring of an illicit love of Dorilaus' youth.

In 1754 Crebillon fils published *Les Heureux Orphelins, histoire imitée de l'anglois*. In this work he uses, with alterations for purposes of erotic interest, Mrs. Haywood's plot up to the point of the telling of Melanthe's story, translating at some points word for word, and at others with freedom, changing the names of the characters to typical English names and titles. The rest of the story is totally different from the original. Melanthe (named "the Countess of Suffolk") gives a very different account of herself, and the last half of the story consists of the *histoire secrète du comte de Chester*, a narrative in epistolary form by a libertine, a Gallicized Lovelace, who was introduced early in the story in amorous pursuit of Lucie (Louisa), the "Mr. B—n" of Mrs. Haywood's narrative. He now glories in carefully executed triumphs over the Countess of Suffolk and two other ladies of the English court. No attempt is made to solve the initial mystery, or to resume the original threads of the narrative.

In 1758 appeared in English *The Happy Orphans, An Authentic History of Persons in High Life. With a variety of uncommon*

¹ For an analysis of this novel see Whicher, *The Life and Romances of Mrs. Eliza Haywood* (New York, 1915), pp. 153–55.

events, and surprising turns of fortune. Translated and improved from the French original. The reviewers at once perceived a similarity between this and Mrs. Haywood's earlier novel. The *Monthly Review* for December, 1758, said:

We are very much mistaken if the above title-page is not *all a lie*. About fifteen years ago was published, in one volume, a novel entitled, *The Fortunate Foundlings*, written, as we believe, by the late famous Mrs. Haywood, of romancing memory. From that work the *Happy Orphans* appears to be taken, about verbatim; the difference chiefly consisting in an alteration of the names; but what the pirate, copiest, or the cobbler, or by whatever title the honest editor chuses to be distinguished—what he means by calling his book a translation from the French, is best known to himself. *Transformed from the English* would, we apprehend, have been nearer the truth.¹

The *Critical Review* investigated the case and disagreed with the *Monthly's* decision, declaring that the tone and ideas in the two works are very different, since this one "tries to inform as well as entertain"; the reviewer concludes, therefore, that "it may be translated from the French with liberties."²

A comparison of this work with those of Mrs. Haywood and Crebillon shows that the anonymous author translated almost *verbatim* Crebillon's (not Mrs. Haywood's) story up to the point of the Countess of Suffolk's (Melanthe's) history, and then in turn disregarded his original, constructed a third biography for that lady of quality, and, carrying the story to as great length as Crebillon's, made it equally unlike both his and Mrs. Haywood's versions, and far more moralistic than either. The mystery is solved in the end by making the twins, Lucy and Edward (the names throughout are Crebillon's), the offspring of a union between a half-brother of the Earl of Rutland (Dorilaus) and an injured French lady, the union legalized by a forced marriage followed by the death of the bridegroom.

The anonymous author in this case makes a deliberate effort to appear the meticulous translator. Whereas Crebillon had cloaked all his material, plagiarized and original, under the subtitle *histoire imitée de l'anglois*, this writer appends several footnotes to

¹ *Monthly Review*, XIX (1758), 580.

² *Critical Review*, VII (1759), 174-75.

the translated portion of his story discussing the aptness of word or phrase, or interpreting to an English audience the French author's material; e.g.:

In *French* the word is *violent*; but surely a *violent Situation* is a great inaccuracy of *Metaphor*: This is the only Instance we have yet observed in the Author [Vol. I, p. 52, note].

And:

The *French* denote by the *Exercises* all the ornamental Parts of Education, Dancing, Fencing, etc. [Vol. I, p. 11, note].

Then at the very end of the story, when the material is all his own, he asserts again his function of translator by the note:

Our *French* Novelist, we presume, had no Idea of the Injustice of this Remark; inferior Persons, the *Canaille*, are bad enough everywhere [Vol. II, p. 271, note].

Other examples of this mode of translation are not difficult to find, though some of the tangles they contrive work confusion for the student of English fiction. Similarly free translation was accorded Marivaux's novels. *Le Paysan Parvenu* was translated in 1735 under the title *Le Paysan Parvenu; or, The Fortunate Peasant. Being Memoirs of the Life of Mr. ———. Translated from the French of M. de Marivaux*.¹ In 1757 appeared an altered version entitled *The Fortunate Villager; or, Memoirs of Sir Andrew Thompson*.²

The *Monthly Review* describes this in deprecatory tone:

This is a new Translation, (or rather *transmogrification*), of Marivaux's *Paysan Parvenu*. The Editor has the honesty, in his Preface, to acknowledge from whence he drew his materials; but he would have shewn himself honester still, had he signified as much in his Title-page or Advertisements.

"I have ventured," says he, "to change the scene of action from Paris to London; and the names of the several personages who fill the drama, which, in the original, are truly French, into downright English." But our Metamorphoser seems to have overlooked the propriety of altering also the manners, character, and incidents; which still remain as truly

¹ Esdaille, *A List of English Tales and Prose Romances Printed before 1740* (London, 1912), p. 269.

² *Lond. Mag.*, L (1757), 208; *Lond. Chron.*, I (February 24-26, 1757), 199; *Monthly Review*, XVI (1757), 284. This title appears in the list of novels in a circulating library prefixed to Coleman's *Polly Honeycomb*, acted in 1760.

French as ever: so that *Monsieur* looks as like an Englishman, as Buck in the farce . . . resembles a French Beau. Upon the whole we cannot help preferring the old translation of this book, entitled *The Fortunate Peasant*, printed for Brindley and Corbet in the year 1735.

Marivaux's *Vie de Marianne* was even more variously treated. Three translations of this novel appeared in rapid succession: A literal translation (1736-42), known only from the notices in the *Gentleman's Magazine*,¹ is entitled *The Life of Marianne; or, the Adventures of the Countess of ———. By M. de Marivaux. Translated from the French Original*. A much altered version, appearing, I believe, soon after this, though we know it only in the later reprint in the *Novelist's Magazine*, is entitled *The Virtuous Orphan; or, the Life of Marianne*; this contains many interpolations and a conclusion quite foreign in tone to the French original. In 1746 appears what seems to be an abridgment of this version with the French names changed to English, entitled *The Life and Adventures of Indiana, the Virtuous Orphan*.²

Clara Reeve was familiar with the translations of Marivaux; in 1785 in her *Progress of Romance* she deals caustically with such "transmogrifications." She speaks of the "poor literal translation" of *Marianne* published in 1742, and then continues:

Soon after another attempt was made by a still worse hand, this is called *Indiana or the virtuous Orphan*, in this piece of patchwork, many of the fine reflexions, the most valuable part of the work are omitted, the Story left, unfinished by the death of M. *Marivaux*, is finished by the same bungler, and in the most absurd manner. It puts me in mind of what was said to a certain translator of *Virgil*.

Read the commandments friend,—translate no further,
For it is written, thou shalt do no murder.³

Of Marivaux's other novel she speaks also:

Sophronia. Is the *Paysan Parvenue* (*sic*) translated into English? *Eupharasia*. It is but not much better than *Marianne*, nor is it so well known, it is frequent-confounded with the *Paysanne Parvenue* of the Chevalier Mouhy, which without half its merit is much more popular.⁴

¹ Esdaile, *op. cit.*, pp. xxxii, 269.

² The relations between these translations I have discussed in an article, "Translations of the *Vie de Marianne* and Their Relation to Contemporary English Fiction," *Mod. Phil.*, XV (1917), 491-512.

³ *Progress of Romance* (Colchester, 1785), pp. 129-30.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 130. Perhaps some student with access to the volumes can tell whether variations similar to those found in the successive translations of Marivaux's novels

The theories justifying such liberties as these translators allowed themselves are explained in the translator's prefaces to other works of the time. John Lockman, poet and translator, gives technical grounds for his practice in the preface to his translation of another work of Marivaux's, *Pharsamond; or, the New Knight-Errant* *By Monsieur de Marivaux, Member of the French Academy in Paris: Author of The Life of Marianne, etc. Translated by Mr. Lockman* (1750). He says:

I not only endeavour'd to avoid *Gallicisms*; but even gave, whenever I thought this could be done with Propriety, an English termination to the *Names* of Persons. This reconciles, still more, an English Reader's Mind to such a Work; in like manner as a Foreigner's conforming Himself to the Dress of a Country, is more pleasing to the Eyes of it's Natives.

I speak with greater Confidence on these Heads, as the publick have been particularly indulgent to one of my English Versions, drawn up according to these Rules; I mean the very ingenious *M. de Voltaire's Letters Concerning the English Nation*.¹

Much liberty is justified on moral grounds. The triumph of British decorum appears in the preface to another translation: *The Beau-Philosopher; or, the History of the Chevalier de Mainvillers. Translated from the French Original* (1751):

The Translator flatters himself with the Hope, that those who have a Sense of Virtue, will pardon his having, in the Course of this Work, sometimes check'd the Sallies of his Author's Wit, when it began to grow prophane, and the Lusciousness of an Expression, when tending to corrupt or debilitate the Mind of the young Reader: That they will pardon him, if in any Instance where Profaneness and Lewdness have been united, he has broke the Conjunction; and by presuming to alter a Word or two, has given a different Turn to a Thought, or cloathed an Expression with greater Decency.²

Similarly in 1741 a translation of *The Decameron* was commended to "the Publick" with the assurance of the publisher (Dodsley) "that such care has been taken in this Translation to

appear in the two translations of the Chevalier de Mouhy's *La Paysanne Parvenue*: the anonymous translation entitled *The Fortunate Countrymaid* (1740-41), reprinted in the *Novelist's Magazine*; and Mrs. Haywood's version, *The Virtuous Villager* (1742). (*Vide* Whicher, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-52.)

¹ From a copy in the University of Chicago Library; Preface [p. ii].

² From a copy in the University of Chicago Library; Preface, pp. ix-x.

render the Expression delicate and decent, that even the Ladies need not be afraid of reading or having these ingenious Novels."¹

Perhaps, however, a consideration more potent than these accounts for the freedom of the average hack translator. Under the pseudonym Felicité de Biron one of these writers defends the translators of Grub Street in the "Preface by the Translator" to *The Adventures and Amours of the Marquis de Noailles and Mademoiselle Tencin*. *Translated from a French Manuscript* (1756):

Besides, as Delays and Revisals are terrible Things to Translators, who seldom happen to be over-loaded with Cash, the pretty Manner of delivering a few Sheets of Copy into the Printer's Hand on a *Saturday Night*, for which *he's down with the Dust*, is a most convenient Way of Dealing, and makes us Drudges go thro' our Work with cheerful Hearts.²

Such an attitude toward literary property as these examples attest, such license on the part of translators both English and French, throws light upon methods of literary craftsmanship which influenced the growing fictional technique, and upon cosmopolitan relationships affecting the novel of the time.³

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¹ Straus, *Robert Dodsley, Poet, Publisher and Playwright* (London and New York, 1910), p. 322.

² From the copy in the University of Chicago Library; Preface, p. viii.

³ Since this paper was written there appeared in *Mod. Lang. Notes*, XXXIII (December, 1918), 469-71, an article by Mr. W. Kurrelmeyer, "A German Version of Joseph Andrews," which discusses a garbled translation of Fielding's novel from a French version into German, entitled, *Fieldings Komischer Roman*, Berlin, 1765. "The text," Mr. Kurrelmeyer says, "is that of the *Adventures of Joseph Andrews* apart from the fact that most of the characters have also been disguised under new names. Occasionally also literary disquisitions, allusions to unfamiliar English characters, letters, and the like, have been omitted or shortened, but without affecting the continuity of the story proper." That a French version is the source is indicated by slight emendations of names "generally indicative of French influence" and "a number of notes and additions to the text which were evidently intended for a French public."